Progressive Calvinism

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Introduction To Volume III Of Progressive Calvinism

With this issue we begin the third year of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, a monthly devoted to an examination of modern Calvinism (or more broadly, Christianity) in the field of ethics.

This publication is published by avowed Calvinists. However, it looks inward rather than outward; by that we mean that it is not disposed to criticize the "world" first and the church second, but to employ the reverse order; it begins with the church.

There must be a cause why the church today has a declining significance. The poor repute of the church in the world is undoubtedly the church's own fault.

This publication holds that the modern church has become sanctimonious, unscriptural and illogical in its ethical doctrine, and lax in its discipline. It believes that the modern church in the field of ethics lacks intellectual respectability and is a matter of amusement to some and of indifference to many. It believes also that the ethics of the church have become unhinged from *genuine* modern social science; (the modern church gets, it is acknowledged, extensive support from some economists and social scientists, but they are men who teach obvious fallacies or dress up old fallacies in a new technical jargon which impresses the public; (1) those fallacies have long ago been refuted by plain logic, and (2) they are daily being discredited by experience).

This publication believes that the principles underlying the ethics of the modern Christian church are the same principles that underlie the ethics of socialism, and consequently (by proper extension) the ethics of communism. Obviously, there must be confusion somewhere — among either the church members or the socialists-communists. This publication has concluded that the worse confusion exists among the church members. Instead of being an agency for good in the "world," the church has become a saltless salt, or is positively on the wrong side.

These remarks do not apply to every church or every church member. But they apply to many.

The publishers of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM are members of a conservative and arrogant* protestant denomination, Reformed in doctrine and Presbyterian in government, of Dutch origin, and with approximately 175,000 members. Its name is: The Christian Reformed Church. The founders of this publication know more or less what the trend is in this denomination. What is developing is considered by the founders to be in the direction of the deterioration of true religion. However, what is developing is not something unique, but something that is typical. Events in this denomination can be used to illustrate general problems, and that is this publication's policy.

Although a publication by members of a Calvinist church, PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM does not operate significantly in the field of doctrinal differences, that is, in the field of *theology,* with the purpose of making converts to the Reformed (Calvinist) interpretation of Christianity. If and when it covers *theology* it does so merely to show what it considers to be an illogical or indefensible phase within Reformed theology. This publication does not have the objective of criticizing Arminianism, or Lutheranism, or Catholicism or other manifestations of Christianity. Adherents of these other faiths need not be apprehensive concerning criticism of their theology and ethics, except in so far as such theology and ethics are subject to the same deficiencies by which Reformed (Calvinist) theology and ethics are considered to be blemished. This publication is not working at taking splinters out of the eyes of other faiths; it is working on the beam in its own eye.

It should also be noted that PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM may refer to a denomination when it really refers only to some members of that denomination. The answers to many modern problems are not "spelled out" in the ancient church standards still in use. In a sense, then, the denominations do not have a specific answer to a modern problem, for example, unionism, "discrimination" or socialism. When a church name is used for the sake of simplicity of sentence structure, the real reference will often be to the prevailing thought in the church as reflected in unchallenged ideas in a magazine, a speech, in reports on group meetings, or in a book. If these ideas have hitherto not been challenged by anyone in the

*It also has the corollary, a serious inferiority complex.

denomination, but are obviously tolerated, no significant mistake is made when those ideas are considered to be "accepted" in a particular denomination.

A completely different approach could be made by this publication. It might change its policy and begin by berating the world for not accepting Christianity, or not accepting one of its branches: Calvinism. It might declare that the problem is the world and not the church. There are enough publications doing that, and so there is no good reason to duplicate the effort.

Although critical of ideas prevailing in churches, this publication is, it should be understood, not a hostile critic but a well-intentioned one. Well-intentioned criticism may be evaluated to be such only if it is general and never specific. This publication lacks confidence in generalities. It refers to men and to cases.

PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM calls attention to what everyone can see as if it were posted on a spectacular electric sign, to wit: *the influence of the church is steadily waning.* If this trend is to be arrested and if an improvement is to be accomplished, the church must of necessity begin with reforming and improving itself. fn

Morality And Personal Conduct Versus Morality And The Socio-Economic Order

Scripture almost entirely relates morality to personal conduct. In PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM we are disposed to do the same thing.

But morality can also be considered to be significantly related to the socio-economic structure. The modern churches have moved in that direction. Currently, among members of the Christian Reformed church, there is considerable discussion about "corporate responsibility." The morality taught in many denominations is no longer primarily personal morality but group morality. The principles of morality are applied to society as a whole or to groups in society. This *group* approach to morality represents, we believe, a deterioration.

The explanation of this trend in appraising morality is partly to be found in the harmful influence of modern sociology; the

concepts with which sociology deals are mostly group concepts. This drift away from individualism in morality and away from scriptural emphases will eventually have gravely undesirable effects.

Modern economists are in this respect somewhat like the modern church. Economists also usually emphasize the "economic order" rather than personal morality. How is morality related to the "economic order"? Is group morality distinct and different from individual morality?

In this issue we are accommodating ourselves to the modern way of thinking. We are here considering the application of the principles of morality to the socio-economic structure. fn

Is The Economic Order Properly Based On Neighborly Love?

The term *economic order* is here used to mean the way that society is organized for the production and distribution of goods. We are concerned about the principles that underlie that economic organization.

The economic order can be socialist, syndicalist, capitalist or interventionist.* It can provide a large measure of freedom or very little freedom.

The economic order can be appraised *rationalistically* in the sense that one kind of economic order yields more goods and prosperity than another kind of economic order. Economists are disposed to appraise the economic order favorably when it gives greater general prosperity or happiness than some other economic order. The answers, of course, vary: some economists favor capitalism; others favor syndicalism; others favor socialism; still others favor interventionism. The answers are of all shades and degrees.

People with a religious bent do not rest with such a rationalistic approach to the question of the economic order; they ask: is the economic order properly based on the scriptural law of brotherly or neighborly love?

*For meaning of terms, see June 1955 PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, pages 152 ff.

Unfortunately, the answer must be partly negative. The economic order, logically, is based on part of the law of brotherly love, but not the whole of it.

In 1955 issues (February, March, April and May) of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM the law of brotherly (or neighborly; the terms are here used interchangeably) love was defined as follows:

1. Doing no harm to the neighbor.
2. Showing forebearance and forgiveness.
3. Exercising charity.
4. Proclaiming the gospel.

The law of brotherly love cannot be more than this and still be in harmony with Scripture. This is however still a broad definition, although narrower than sanctimonious definitions of the law of brotherly love, which consider legitimate self-interest sinful and require a man to love his neighbor more than himself.

The original general question can now be formulated more specifically: is the economic order founded on *all* the parts of the foregoing definition of brotherly love?

The answers here given are in the reverse order in the foregoing list.

I

The *economic order,* any reasonable man will concur, is not the proper agency for the proclamation of the gospel. That, at least, immediately justifies the conclusion that the economic order cannot be used to manifest the *whole* definition of brotherly or neighborly love. In that sense the economic order is not based on the law of brotherly love.

II

The *economic order,* most people will also agree after some reflection, is not properly organized if its basic principle is *charity.*

Charity disregards merit. It is a response to a situation, especially emergencies. In contrast, a rational economic order must be based on solid merit. The chain of events in accordance with which the economic order is based on merit is as follows: (1) A

man knows his own needs far better than he knows the needs of others. (2) In protecting his own interests each man appraises other men's services and goods by comparisons, one with another. (3) He deals with whoever will do the most *for him.*

But if all his decisions were based on "charity", that is, based on what he *imagined* the needs of others to be in contrast to his sure *knowledge* of his own needs, then he would in each instance be making decisions where his information was far inferior and in many instances worthless.

Society cannot basically be founded on charity because people do not want others to make their decisions for them, which is exactly what happens in the case of charity. *A* knows his own needs better than he knows the needs of *B, C, D, E* and *F.* To found a society on charity involves, then, a decision to base it on relative ignorance rather than on knowledge.

Further, the free exchange of goods between men is not properly based on one man losing and the other man gaining, or on neither man gaining but both "breaking even." If that were the situation, there would be no inducement to exchange goods. Free exchange occurs only when both parties prefer to exchange rather than not to exchange. Neither may be fully happy about the terms of the exchange for him, but he is happier to exchange than not to exchange. Therefore, relatively he gains by exchange, that is, by cooperation. Such exchanges are in no sense based on charity.

Exchange occurs normally only when people decide and act on the basis of their own self-regarding interests. Occasionally, someone will over-pay or *vice versa* sell at a too-low price, *deliberately* in order to help the other party. But by whatever amount the price is made purposefully to deviate from what it would otherwise be, charity is being dispensed by one party to the other. Such transactions, being more or less inconsequential in the total of all transactions, are incidental to the *regular* economic order. Charity, in consequence, is limited to being a supplemental factor in the economic order. It should, indeed, never be more than that. Moses indicated that ten percent might be about right. However, we do not wish to make a strictly mathematical approach; "circumstances alter cases." It might properly sometimes be less than ten percent;

and it might properly at another time be considerably more than ten percent.

Let us assume for a moment that charity is (or could be) the general foundation of the economic order. Let us apply it in two cases. We here use the word *charity* in a special (very broad) sense, as a term contrary to *what is deserved on the basis of merit.*

A big corporation elects an incompetent man as its president. The affairs of the company then begin to deteriorate. The president should be discharged. But, someone may say, that would be unkind; show him brotherly love; keep him on as president; to fail to do that manifests a lack of charity. Show your brotherly love by giving him something beyond his deserts.

But that is sanctimony and is not legitimate charity. Charity, correctly defined, means that *A, at A's expense,* gives to *B* something for which *B* provides no equivalent. The moment that *A gives B* something that *B* does not deserve at *C* and *D's* expense, a compromised act has been perpetrated. This may look like a good deed relative to *B* but it must also look like an evil deed relative to *C* and *D*. Therefore, to retain a man as a company president who is unfit may appear to be charity, but it is not. What that man offers in exchange for his remuneration is inadequate. Everybody else will be injured by the false "charity" of keeping him on as president — the customers of the company, the employees of the company and the stockholders of the company. There is no ground to recommend the retention of the president on the ground of charity, because it is not genuine charity.

Or consider a factory employee. Let us assume that he has been employed all his life in a carriage factory. But people are buying automobiles and not carriages. The company making carriages should be discontinued; there is no purpose in making carriages which people do not want. But to do so means that this factory employee at 58 years of age will lose his job. He knows no work other than carriage making. In the name of charity some people may say that wood, steel and labor should continue to go into making unwanted carriages. But this also is *at the expense of other people.* What is wasted cannot be consumed in a form in which it is really wanted. What is being wasted on carriages can,

in a sense, be considered as a reduction in the number of automobiles which people do want.

Of course, if there is a sudden and distressing shift in demand, then employers, employees and everybody else will endeavor to cushion the shock for themselves and others. But nevertheless there *must* be an adjustment to reality. Usually, the more promptly the adjustment is made, the better; the more "charity" in such situations beyond a limited point, the greater probability that a mistake is being made.

To *insist* on charity as the basis for the economic order involves a positive violation of the Second Table of the Law of Moses. *Coerced charity,* that is, charity which is made compulsory as a by-product of the economic order,* violates at least two of the Commandments, the Sixth (Thou shalt not kill) which is against coercion, and the Eighth (Thou shalt not steal) which must obviously cover theft by public acts as well as private thefts.

To insist that charity be compulsory, or may piously be made compulsory by some economic order for society, is to pervert the moral teaching of Scripture. Christian Reformed congregations commonly have a "budget." The budget covers only those expenditures in a congregation for which a member presumably gets "value received," such expenditures as for minister's salary, operating expenses of the church, etc. The contributions for *charity* are not put in the budget or considered obligatory. They are, instead, voluntary. There are no grounds for believing that the state has any more-*moral* grounds for *demanding* charity than the church has. For charity to be made obligatory by one man versus another man is to subvert what the Mosaic law teaches.

A reader familiar with Old Testament law may think there is an exception to this, namely, the Mosaic legislation forbidding the gleaning of the fields and vineyards, in order that such gleanings might be available to the poor. But this is not *A* leaving something for *B* at the expense of *C* and of *D*. In this case *A* was required to leave something for *B* at *A*'s own expense; it was his own field which was not to be gleaned by himself. This law proclaimed by Moses is a general rule from God to man. It is not one man coercing another.

*For example, progressive income taxation.

It is not being disputed that the law of brotherly love *individually* requires the exercise of charity. But the law of brotherly love *cannot* be extended to cover coerced collective charity.

Ordinary common sense is constantly being applied everywhere to eliminate *charity* from being a significant part of the economic order.

III

The *economic order,* most people will also agree, is not basically founded on *forebearance and forgiveness.*

The economic order is really founded on just the opposite. A man who by thrift has saved a thousand dollars does not loan it to another with the intent of "forgiving" the borrower the obligation and forebearing to ask repayment. Forebearance and forgiveness may enter into the situation in special cases, as in bankruptcy, but any forgiveness of this kind is involuntary and the bankrupt finds that his reputation has been permanently damaged.

In the economic order forebearance and forgiveness are usually exercised only for self-regarding reasons. Consideration will be shown, not because of affection, but because in the long run there will be a gain from the forebearance — as from a moratorium in the repayment of debts by a nonliquid debtor.

If forebearance were a basic principle in business, the more of it that is exercised, the better the economic order would be promoted. Actually, the basic policy of business must be just the reverse — not to promote occasions for exercising forebearance, but to promote the avoidance of the need of forebearance.

Further, if forebearance were a genuinely general principle underlying the economic order, merit and justice would be eliminated as a principle for controlling the economic order, in proportion as forebearance was applied. If forebearance were indeed a principle, then it should be considered good conduct to annul merit and justice by the complete overwhelming of them by forebearance. This is an absurdity to which no reasonable person will agree.

Forebearance and forgiveness, therefore, are as was the case with charity only supplemental factors in the basic organization of society.

IV

With what part of the law of brotherly love are we now left as a foundation for the economic order? With only that part of the law of brotherly love, which although difficult to perform, is the most important (except the gospel), namely, we are left with the proposition that the foundation for the economic order consists of the prohibitions in the Second Table of the Law (as defined in a restricted sense), especially Commandments Six (against violence); Eight (against theft); Nine (against fraud); and Ten (against covetousness). We are left with no more than this: *you may not harm your neighbor.* That is the foundation of society with the concrete resting on solid rock.

This obvious foundation should not blind anyone to what is an unavoidable and essential corollary to the commandments in the Second Table of the Decalogue, namely, *everything not prohibited is free.*

Life and happiness and welfare, viewed correctly, do not consist in being permitted to injure the neighbor. That is a perverted view. The fulness and richness of life in temporal matters must consist in the grand freedom which consists in being *permitted to do everything except what is wrong.* Attention should be fixated on what we may do, rather than on what we may not do. This is a definition of real freedom and not a definition resulting in narrowness of life or in unhappiness. (See February, March, April and May 1955 issues of Progressive Calvinism.)

We are reminded again of the great statement of Sallust of ancient Rome, quoted by Grotius in his *The Law Of War And Peace* (Chapter XV, page 79, Translation by S. M. Knight, Peace Book Company, 5 Goodwin Court, Martin's Lane, London, W. C. 2, 1939), our italics:

> Our ancestors, most religious of men, took nothing from the vanquished *except liberty to do wrong.*

The Decalogue does no more. It takes away only the liberty to do wrong. Beyond that is a glorious freedom, if we can only see it, instead of fixating our attention on the prohibitions. Few people

are able to see that freedom because they have their eyes riveted to the prohibitions of the commandments and because they *constantly wish to help themselves,* contrary to the law of God, *at the expense of the neighbor.*

* * *

It is concluded, therefore, that the only foundation of the economic order is the Second Table of the Mosaic Law *strictly interpreted,* with its corollary *freedom;* which in turn is based on its corollary, *legitimate self-interest;* which in turn is based on its corollary, *merit.*

In the sense explained in the foregoing, we consider the economic order to have its proper foundation only on part of the Mosaic law of brotherly love. fn

Men Orthodox On One Subject And Unorthodox On Another

A religion can be:

1. Wrong in its theology, and wrong in its ethics;
2. Wrong in its theology and right in its ethics;
3. Right in its theology, and wrong in its ethics;
4. Right in its theology, and right in its ethics.

By means of the foregoing classification emphasis can be laid on the fact that an individual or a denomination can be right in its theology, and nevertheless wrong in its ethics. That situation, it is believed, exists for some members of the Christian Reformed church.

Similarly, by means of the foregoing classification emphasis can be laid on the fact that an individual or a denomination can be wrong in its theology, and nevertheless right in its ethics. That situation, it is believed, exists (for example) in the case of Spiritual Mobilization, one of whose organizers is Dr. James W. Fifield, Jr., pastor of the large Congregational church in Los Angeles. Formerly, Dr. Fifield was a pastor of the East Side Congregational

church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where those who learned to know him became aware of his great industry, organizing ability and practical soundness.

PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM agrees with the Christian Reformed church in regard to its theology; it disagrees with many members of that church in regard to ethics, morality, and the economic order. Further, PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM agrees with Dr. Fifield (for example) in ethics, morality and the economic order, but disagrees with him in regard to theology.

We would like to hold to the idea that if a man is sound in his theology he is also sound in his ethics; and *vice versa*, that if a man is unsound in his theology he must also be unsound in his ethics. But although that may be a tendency, it is most certainly not always the fact.

The situation in these matters is of vital importance in regard to the *Social Gospel*. On the Social Gospel (1) some of the members of the Christian Reformed church, (2) Spiritual Mobilization and (3) PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM are not agreed. The Social Gospel has its own theology and its own ethics. Here is the situation:

1. Some members of the Christian Reformed church oppose the Social Gospel because of its theology, but accept the ethics of the Social Gospel.

2. Spiritual Mobilization opposes the bad ethics of the Social Gospel, but accepts the theology of the Social Gospel.

3. PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, in contrast to (1) and (2) foregoing, opposes the Social Gospel on two counts: it rejects *both* the ethics *and* the theology of the Social Gospel. In that sense we differ from Spiritual Mobilization and from some members of the Christian Reformed church, *both*.

This publication appraises any deviation of members of the Christian Reformed church toward the ethics of the Social Gospel to be as destructive as any deviation in theology would be.

When someone defends the Christian religion, what is he defending — its theology or its ethics? When someone attacks the Christian religion, what is he attacking — its theology or its ethics?

fn

The Contempt Of Economists For "Christianity"

The most distinguished (or at least, one of the most distinguished) living, native American economists holds the opinion, we are told, that *Christianity is the greatest evil in the world.* He may be right. It depends on what is meant by Christianity.

That economist, approaching social and economic questions as a trained technician, apparently observes two things:

1. That there are "Fundamentalist Christians" who concern themselves very much about a future life; they are so much interested in the future that they are somewhat indifferent about this world, the world with which economics is concerned. That appears to be nonsensical to that economist.

2. That there are "Social Gospel Christians" who concern themselves almost entirely with this life; but that economist knows that their Social Gospel program involves foolish and destructive economics.

How is that economist to judge Christianity in regard to practical, this-worldly matters, by the Fundamentalist tendency to be somewhat indifferent about this world, or by the destructive and foolish economic ideas of the social gospel?

That economist apparently holds the view that the Social Gospel generally represents Christianity today; after all, by far the majority of protestant clergymen in America favor the ethics of the Social Gospel; and some priests of the Catholic church do too. Therefore, so that economist apparently reasons, Christianity as an ethical system must be judged today in America by what the Social Gospel teaches, and not by what the Fundamentalists teach. Because Christianity is considered by him to be the Social Gospel, he concludes that Christianity is one of the greatest evils in the world.

We are in agreement with him, if (but only if) the Social Gospel is considered to be Christianity.

It is not reasonable to assume that that economist is an exception. Why should not other economists hold the same view of the Social Gospel and consequently of Christianity?

We are not personally acquainted with the economist whom we have described and our information is hearsay, although reliable. This we know personally: the qualified economists whom we do know generally identify Christianity — Protestant and Catholic — with the Social Gospel, and lack respect for Christianity because of its obvious ignorance and error in regard to a sound and beneficent social or economic order.

The Christian religion by its program of promoting the Social Gospel brings contempt and hatred upon itself. As the expression goes: "It has it coming to it." fn

Of What Do The Ethics Of The Social Gospel Consist?

If competent economists are contemptuous of the Christian religion, (1) because they consider the Social Gospel to be economic nonsense and iniquity, and (2) because they consider the Social Gospel to be synonymous with Christianity, then what is this Social Gospel, in its positive aspects, that is, in its ethics, which is the specific phase from which it takes its name?

Although space is lacking to expand on this subject at this time, we need a summary of what the Social Gospel really is.

In the first place it is not *the* Gospel. If it were, an addition would not be applied to the term, namely, Social.

The popular definition of the Social Gospel is that it seeks an earthly Kingdom of God. This earthly Kingdom of God involves certain economic and political ideas. In simplest language the Social Gospel, as a minimum, teaches a Welfare State. In actual practice, it is almost or entirely Socialist in its position. The Social Gospel, then, can be interpreted as being (1) a happy and prosperous community, made that way by such great brotherly love among men that they *voluntarily* sacrifice themselves for their neighbors (that is, love the neighbor more than themselves), or (2) a happy and prosperous community made that way by a presumably well-intentioned government which however *coerces* men through laws which redistribute the rewards of labor so that there

is substantial equality in the income of people, rather than an inequality which arises from variations in effort and in performance under equal laws.

Another way to define the Social Gospel is as a religion which believes that this life is more real and important now than is a future life, and that therefore the greatest merit will be in a *present* ideal Kingdom of God, here and now; not a future life.

But such definitions are too general for our purposes. Temporarily we need a definition which is more specific (although not an exhaustive definition). It is such an inbetween definition which is presented in what follows.

Further, because we are frankly critical and hostile to every phase of the Social Gospel we shall present our description of it in the form of an indictment. (Space is not available to append the supporting evidence.) Further, we are limiting our criticisms here to the ethical phases of the Social Gospel, because that is the really positive part of the Social Gospel.

Our indictment of the ethical phases of the Social Gospel is as follows:

I. The Social Gospel is immoral; it is contrary to the Decalogue.

   A. It does not reject as being in violation of the Sixth Commandment, certain forms of coercion, namely coercion required to accomplish an *alleged* good.

   B. Its attitude toward the economic order is not founded on the idea that coveting (forbidden in the Tenth Commandment) is really sin.

   C. Great services and thrift, sometimes resulting in considerable means, may properly be frustrated by Social Gospel legislation, that is, these characteristics may lead to undesirable social and economic conditions.

II. The Social Gospel is naive, and consequently somewhat ridiculous.

   A. It has a mistaken notion of economic reality.

1. It assumes that the *welfareshortage* in society is not a natural and general welfareshortage; but instead:

2. It assumes that all poverty results not from natural causes, but solely from one man having too much and another man too little, which difference is the result of the first man exploiting the second man. It is assumed that to end the alleged exploitation will result in universal plenty and a complete ending of the *general* welfareshortage.

B. It has a mistaken notion of the nature of man.

1. It denies a universal *total depravity.* It accepts a total depravity only among those ruled, and not among those who rule.

2. It assumes that politicians (those who rule) have a charisma from God, a direct pipe line of authority and inspiration.

3. It imagines that the man placed at the apex of a government has the mental capacity to determine a general plan for society, that is, that *one* mind in a coercive society can do better than *all* minds cumulatively in a voluntary society. This is a greater folly than (1) and (2), and a greater sin because it is conscienceless arrogance toward God, or as the Greeks would have said, a *hubris,* an inexcusable pride.

C. It has an uninformed notion of the nonpolitical phases of the structure of society. It considers competition to be warfare, whereas it is basically a system of cooperation; it considers freedom to mean chaos, whereas its own central planning has more defects than free, individual planning.

III. The Social Gospel is sanctimonious. It has an exaggerated notion of what is sin and grossly overstates what God requires of men.

A. It considers the pursuit of self-regarding interest, that is, looking out for yourself (without, however,

in any way exploiting the neighbor), as nevertheless being sin. Scripture does not, however, teach that self-interest itself is wicked, but only self-interest exercised at the expense of the neighbor, by means of coercion, fraud, theft, falsehood. This is an immeasureably more limited proposition.

B. It teaches that *agape* love is required. *Agape* love is then defined as a God-like love. It has in itself no self-interest whatever. It is completely devoid of motivation relative to the self. To exercise *agape* love you must self-efface yourself. You no longer love your neighbor *as yourself,* because then the self would be the standard. *Agape* is above such a low standard.

C. *Discrimination* is sin. To exercise choice is to prefer one to the other. To prefer one to the other is unbrotherly and unneighborly, and therefore discrimination — preference — is sin. You may not *really* prefer the good to the evil, the beautiful to the ugly, the wise to the foolish, the clean to the dirty, the true to the false, because if you prefer the good, beautiful, wise, clean and true to the evil, ugly, foolish, dirty and false you have not loved men who are more of the latter as you have loved those who are more of the former.

D. The exercise of Biblical charity is not enough. In addition God is squeezed in as a link between the giver and the recipient. This is attempted by saying that the giver is a *steward,* which is true enough in itself. God is said to be the real owner, and then this primary ownership by God is indicated to require of every man that he be a redistributor rather than a possessor. Charity is now approximately ten percent; stewardship in a general way raises the percentage far higher. Stewardship is often only a vague term to cover covetous claims beyond specific charity.

IV. The Social Gospel is ridiculous, because it is contrary-to-purpose. Instead of accomplishing the hoped-for end,

namely no welfareshortage, but general prosperity, it does just the opposite; it lowers general prosperity. Social Gospel societies (the welfare and socialist societies) are always poor, and bellicose and unfree; if they are not that to begin with they become poor, bellicose and tyrannical.

A. A Social Gospel society does not permit maximum cooperation, because it regulates and frustrates exchanges; consequently men are poorer.

B. It endeavors to nullify creational realities, namely, the differences in men, which differences if permitted to exist so that one would supplement the other naturally (that is, without coercion) would result in greater productivity. The able, industrious and thrifty who would naturally get more than others because they benefit society more are not considered by the Social Gospel to be entitled to retain their larger receipts; as stewards they must surrender enough to approximate equality for all.

V. The Social Gospel proposes arrangements between men which violate the teachings of Scripture.

A. It teaches that Social Justice is evidenced by equality in the end result in men's lives, which can be accomplished only by unequal laws. To make men who are different and unequal to be alike and equal in the end is accomplishable only by having the laws bear differently on different men. This necessary inequality in laws to accomplish equality in the end result is repeatedly cursed in Scripture. Society must choose between equal laws and unequal results, or unequal laws and equal results. Scripture chooses the former; the Social Gospel, the latter.

B. It exalts the State and society generally; the individual must submit to the state and conform to the group. It tends to violate individuality. The group takes precedence over the individual; not that "The State is God," but there is a trace of that thought in

the Social Gospel idea of society as the Kingdom of God.

VI. The Social Gospel suffers from hallucinations.

A. The Social Gospel sets rules of morality which it believes can or should operate to neutralize economic law. It does not realize that economic *law* exists and is as real as *natural* laws. As natural laws are not nullifiable by legislation or by absurd statements on morality; so equally, economic *laws* are not nullified by legislation or by pronouncements on morality. The intellectual foundation of the Social Gospel is practically unmitigated ignorance of economic laws. The writings of every Social Gospel moralist with which we are acquainted gives evidence of such ignorance. Any structure allegedly based on morality but unrelated to and in conflict with natural and economic laws is not to be heeded.

C. By authorizing the State to be tyrannical because of its assumed charisma, it destroys the autonomy of other *spheres* of life. There is no genuine sphere sovereignty (so-called) left, (or better stated) there is no individual liberty left.

D. It authorizes the state to do by passing laws and by bureaucratic regulation what no individual personally may do, according to the Decalogue. This double standard of morality is extended to groups generally; as a corollary there is a general subordination of the individual to groups. This is a double standard of morality, namely, a group may do what an individual may not do.

E. It authorizes compulsion to require the doing of good, rather than authorizes compulsion only to restrain evil. It thus undertakes to do more than God undertook with man, because He left man free, and considered only voluntary respect and affection to have merit.

F. It teaches that *social justice* is something superior to *justice,* and consequently that there can be a *righteousness* of the social gospel, achievable (only) by violation of scriptural justice.

Progressive Calvinism rejects all the foregoing ideas.

1. In the first place, they are tainted with sanctimony.

2. They require immeasureably more than the Christian religion requires.

3. They require the impossible of human nature. Is is unrealistic to expect so much of men.

4. Under the guise of sanctimony, they involve violation of Commandments Six, Eight, Nine and Ten of the Second Table of the Law, and Commandment One in the First Table of the Law; in regard to the latter, the position and activities of God are usurped by men.

The Social Gospel does not have a single effective solution of social, economic and moral problems. It is a complete fabric of errors. The Social Gospel proposes principles for a social, political and economic order which are all erroneous. What it proposes is not only evil, but it neglects to find an available correct solution to the real problems of men in society.

Who hold to some or all of these Social Gospel ideas? Or, if they do not hold openly to these ideas, nevertheless (maybe unconsciously) hold to the underlying principles of the positive ethics of the Social Gospel? We shall mention only a few:

1. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner
2. Reinhold Niebuhr and Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam
3. The editors of the *Christian Century*
4. Bishop Anders Nygren of Sweden
5. The World Council of Churches
6. The editors of so-called Reformed magazines

7. Various Christian Reformed educators and theologians.

Some of these men may not subscribe to any of the *theology* of the Social Gospel; but they do subscribe to some or all of the *ethics* of the Social Gospel as defined in the foregoing; or at least their ideas can have no other foundation (in the form of undeclared premises) than the principles of the Social Gospel. fn

An Opportunity That Members Of The Christian Reformed Church* Have Bungled

The *social gospel* is in several respects one of the greatest evils in the world. It is destructive of the Christian religion and a disgrace to its name.

Nevertheless members of Calvinist churches have failed to fight this evil in Christendom by an understandable means that was at their disposal.

There are two grounds on which the social gospel could be discredited:

1. On the ground of what it more or less negatively teaches regarding the supernatural and eschatological; or

2. On the ground of what it positively teaches about morality and the social and economic order of society in the present world.

In regard to (1) — the supernatural and eschatological — everyone is dealing in a matter of faith. In regard to (2) — morality and the social and economic order — everyone is dealing not only with a matter of faith, but also equally with a matter of reason and a matter of experience.

Members of the Christian Reformed church have generally taken a position against the Social Gospel in regard to (1), and properly so. This subject, however, because it is a matter of *faith,* is not susceptible of proof, except by the interpretation (exegesis)

*The word *church* is used loosely here to mean the prevailing thought in the denomination.

of a book (namely, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments) which however does not have proof in itself that is *generally* accepted by men as evidence that it is trustworthy on those *supernatural* matters. To repeat, the supernatural and eschatological are not, according to the ideas of many, matters of logical proof but of faith.

Members of the Christian Reformed church have in regard to (2), to our knowledge, not gone on record that they disagree with the ethics of the Social Gospel. Instead, in these *positive* aspects of the Social Gospel — in regard to the very things which the Social Gospel itself considers really important — many have in fact accepted practically the whole of that Social Gospel.

What, now, is the great opportunity which members of Calvinist churches have lost in regard to the Social Gospel?

The positive content of the Social Gospel, that is, its ethical content, is false, on three counts:

1. It is contrary to the *teaching of Scripture,* a book which orthodox Calvinist churches consider to be authoritative and reliable.

2. It is contrary to *reason,* in the sense that it is contrary to the science of ethics and the science of economics.

3. It is contrary to (that is, it is discredited by) *experience.*

This, then, is the situation: many members of Calvinist churches have for all practical purposes espoused the positive (ethical) aspects of the Social Gospel. By doing that they became party to (a) misinterpreting Scripture, (b) neglecting reason, and (c) disregarding experience. On these three counts they could have proved the ethical teaching of the Social Gospel to be notoriously wrong. But they have not even attempted to do anything of the kind. If they had, they would probably have convinced men of several things, namely: not only that the Social Gospel is irrational (not logical) in its positive teaching; not only that the Social Gospel is destructive (contrary to experience) in its teaching; and not only that the Social Gospel is contrary to the

obvious teaching of Scripture, correctly understood; but they would have convinced men:

1. That in respect to its own positive teaching concerning ethics and economics (the two subjects in which the Social Gospel is especially interested) the Christian Reformed church was right and the Social Gospel was wrong; and

2. That, consequently from the fact which is mentioned in (1), it would have convinced other men that it was sensible to rely on the Christian Reformed interpretations, exegesis and acceptance of what Scripture teaches on the supernatural; and that, in contrast, there was less sense in relying on the skepticism of the Social Gospel regarding the supernatural and eschatological, *because that Social Gospel was so obviously and notoriously wrong in its interpretation of Scripture on ethical questions.*

When members of the Christian Reformed church failed to attack Social Gospel *ethics,* they by that very failure lost an opportunity to be effective champions of true religion in the larger sense.

Worse still, not only have they failed to attack the positive aspects of the Social Gospel (that is, its ethics), many members of the Christian Reformed church have accepted those Social Gospel ethics. We refer to a publication substantially based on Social Gospel ethics, to wit: some of the essays in *God-Centered Living,* a book which is being reviewed serially in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.

Tragedy is often accompanied by some comedy. That is true in this case, too. The Social Gospel in the "most-advanced" theological seminaries is already on the wane. The vanguard of the vanguard of modern religious thought is not much interested any more in the Social Gospel (the union of ethics and pseudo-economics) but is instead interested in the union of religion and psychology, or religion and personality, indicated by the expression, P and R. At this late date some in the Christian Reformed denomination of those who wish to be very modern, thereby to relieve themselves of their inferiority complex, are steadily espousing ever more boldly the ethics of the Social Gospel. They are arriving in time to take over fully the ethics of the Social Gospel at the very

time that its internal disintegration is beginning to become manifest. They will openly accept the ethics of the Social Gospel in time to be left "holding the sack."

Under the circumstances there is only one proper conclusion possible: By being unfaithful to the teachings of Scripture, and by being neglectful of the basic science of economics, members of the Christian Reformed church have bungled the proper presentation of the ethical aspects of the true gospel over against the ethical aspects of the spurious Social Gospel.

Although members of the denomination have neglected Scripture and reason, they will not be able to neglect experience. In some of the articles in *God-Centered Living* the Social Gospel movement in the Christian Reformed church is "advancing" (should be retrogressing) to a position which will be its undoing; it will be espousing fully the ethics of the Social Gospel at the time that experience is proving that that gospel is self-destructive.

A marvelous opportunity to call attention to the ethical pre-eminence of Scripture has been lost. Instead, under confused leadership, the denomination is moving in the direction of an obvious exposure of its tardy imitation of the folly of the ethics of the Social Gospel. fn

Rev. Peter Van Tuinen And The Ethics Of The Social Gospel

The second chapter in *God-Centered Living Or Calvinism In Action* (The Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1951) consists of an article by Rev. Peter Van Tuinen. This article covers a broad field. The title, "The Task of the Church for the Solution of Modern Problems," implies that the author proposes to consider the *whole* task of the church in regard to *all* modern problems.

Consideration will be given to the character of this comprehensive approach, and to what may be its merits and demerits.

Van Tuinen begins by making a basic distinction between churches; namely, they are (1) Fundamentalist and evangelical, or (2) Liberal and promoting the Social Gospel.

What Is Wrong With The Fundamentalists

The Fundamentalists are treated by Van Tuinen in the customary Reformed manner; with some condescension they are declared by Van Tuinen to be correct by and large in their evangelical and eschatological message; but Fundamentalism represents an "extreme" view of the relation of the church to the task of solving the world's problems, that is, of the relation of the church to the social, political and economic order.

Fundamentalism has a tendency, Van Tuinen declares, to define the task of the church as "*evangelism,* in the narrowest sense of the word." This "strongly individualist emphasis" is "not essential to the evangelical faith" but is said to be "rather peculiar to a movement within the evangelical group." These "evangelicals believe the kingdom of God has only future reality, and they regard the present world as pretty much in the hands of the devil." The implication that it might be naive to believe that the present world is "pretty much in the hands of the devil" sounds strange, coming from a preacher in a Reformed denomination which subscribes to Article XV of the *Belgic Confession of Faith* — which testifies concerning Original Sin; or Paragraph Four in the Rejection of Errors in the Third-Fourth Heads of Doctrine in the *Canons of Dort* where the following is rejected:

> Who teach: That the unregenerate man is not really nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God.
>
> For these things are contrary to the express testimony of Scripture: . . .

Van Tuinen declares that the Fundamentalist view of the world is too pessimistic when it expects "that degeneration will go deeper and wider until the end, when the Lord will wipe it all out in one great act of judgment, and establish the kingdom." Do members of the Christian Reformed church generally declare that they believe differently from that expectation of the Fundamentalists?

Van Tuinen then declares that the Fundamentalist position is that "the church therefore has nothing to do with [the world's] problems." She needs only to preach the gospel "to rescue individuals from the fearful judgment of the world" and to convert them. That conversion is considered to be the solution of the world's problems.

Van Tuinen concurs with the Fundamentalist emphasis on the necessity of conversion because the wrong "relations of man to man are the outcome of a wrong relationship between man and God." But . . .

Van Tuinen then comes up with two reservations (page 34): (1) the Fundamentalist witness of redemption alone is not adequate; there must also be a "display of the righteousness of the gospel" in order to establish a "kingdom of God," and (2) "conversion does not in itself solve all problems."

On these subjects Van Tuinen writes (page 34):

> The weakness of this [the fundamentalist] approach is twofold. First of all it tends to ignore the fact that the Christian witness is a witness of righteousness as well as of redemption. The witness of righteousness, like the witness of redemption, must be a display of the righteousness of the gospel, as well as a vocal testimony. The repentance which Jesus preached was a repentance with a view to the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness (Matt. 4:17; 6:33). Evangelical Christianity has too much been satisfied with calling men to repentance, neglecting thereupon to seek the application of the principles of the kingdom of God.
>
> The second weakness of this approach is its failure to take into account the fact that conversion does not in itself solve all problems. It is correct, in case of industrial tension, for example, to ascribe the problem to the presence of sin, and to call the principals to repentance. But sin, ignorance, and misunderstanding continue to exist, even among converted people, and it is quite possible to conceive of labor problems even where the employer and

> all the employees are Christian men. Conversion is only the beginning of the Christian life. At conversion there still remains the difficult task of learning to see and apply the principles of righteousness to the various aspects of daily life and to the several relationships with others. Preaching the Word unto sanctification, as well as preaching it unto conversion, belongs to the task of the church.

With this criticism the Fundamentalists are practically dismissed by Van Tuinen.

The basic idea of Van Tuinen's criticism of Fundamentalism is that it lacks a this-worldly program for the promotion of a this-worldly "kingdom of righteousness." Fundamentalism does not go adequately beyond conversion; it does not have an adequate set of ideas to teach sanctification.

There is apparently a certain fundamental idea held by Van Tuinen which he calls the "righteousness of the gospel" which righteousnes pertains to this life; he apparently believes that the Fundamentalists do not proclaim or display or understand this "righteousness of the gospel."

When an unusual term is used, or when the context reveals that a customary term has a special meaning, a reader is, or should be alerted. The term "righteousness of the gospel" is one of those unusual terms which should be examined. Readers can be certain that this is no ordinary term. What does the term, "righteousness of the gospel" mean?

I

In the first place from the context it is obvious that the term, "righteousness of the gospel" does not refer to salvation by grace, that is, a righteousness imputed to a man which will give him a *future* salvation. This "righteousness" is also not words or testimony, but human action. Van Tuinen writes: "the witness of righteousness . . . must be a *display* of the righteousness of the gospel. "Display" obviously means action.

II

The question immediately arises whether a convert of Fundamentalism is going to fail to "display" his conversion. Will he not

accept and endeavor to obey the Decalogue, the Law of God? Or is such a convert's adherence to the Decalogue not enough? Is there something *more* required than *personal* obedience to the Decalogue?

There may be some Fundamentalists of an anabaptist type who consider that a converted person is above or freed from obedience to the Law of God in this life. But these Fundamentalists are exceptions. The mass of Fundamentalist converts are required by Fundamentalist churches to conform to a Christian way of living, and that Christian way of living is considered to be necessary as the minimum circumstantial evidence of conversion. If there is no change of conduct, an alleged conversion is considered to be spurious. It is not correct to indicate that Fundamentalism lacks an adequate program of sanctification.

The Fundamentalists are, in fact, very exacting in regard to change in living habits, that is, in regard to sanctification in order to give evidence of conversion. They in some cases even prohibit all smoking and all drinking of alcoholic liquors.

Certainly it would seem to be incorrect to allege or imply that Fundamentalism fails to require of converts that they give a "display of the righteousness of the gospel." But that is exactly the deficiency of which Van Tuinen accuses Fundamentalism, as we have just quoted. Either this charge by Van Tuinen against Fundamentalism is false, or it has another meaning. We would, of course, be reluctant to believe that Van Tuinen has made an obviously false statement. Certainly, then his critique must have another meaning. That other meaning must be found for the expression the "righteousness of the gospel," of which righteousness Van Tuinen wants a "display" not provided by Fundamentalists. What must he have in mind?

The "righteousness of the gospel" obviously refers to (1) a concern about matters in this world; (2) group matters rather than individual matters, for example, employers versus employees, not considered so much as individuals but as types or classes; (3) the "structure" of society more than to individual action. The "Kingdom of God" is in this world and must be "displayed" here and now; but the whole structure of society, especially the economic

order needs redemption. That redemption of the structure of society is one of the tasks of the Christian church; this task goes beyond *personal* adherence to the Commandments. Group action and structural correction and redemption of society as a whole is necessary if the "Kingdom of righteousness" is to be displayed and accomplished.

We have concluded, therefore, that Van Tuinen is talking about a righteousness in the structure of society, and not *individual* adherence to the Decalogue, because Fundamentalism certainly does stress that and Van Tuinen is here pointing at something that Fundamentalism does not stress.

There can, therefore, be no reasonable doubt that Van Tuinen here refers to ideas of the kind that the social gospel proclaims. He refers to a righteousness of a structural *social* righteousness, a "Kingdom of God" in this world; and he coins the term "the righteousness of the gospel." A proper socio-economic structure will evince the "righteousness of the gospel."

Van Tuinen will be understood if a word he has omitted be inserted, so that the expression reads, "the righteousness of [a *social*] gospel."

The idea will be better understood in the full sentence:

> The witness of righteousness, like the witness of redemption, must be a display of the righteousness of [a social] gospel, as well as a vocal testimony.

If Van Tuinen does not mean a future Kingdom of God, nor salvation by grace, nor personal righteousness, then what can he mean other than a righteousness beyond that, namely, a socio-economic righteousness?

We consider the criticism of Fundamentalism by Van Tuinen to be wholly inappropriate. Neither fundamentalism nor Calvinism nor any branch of the Christian religion needs the "righteousness of [a social] gospel," when the meaning must refer to a structural righteousness as for example, the program of the Social Gospel.

The basic morality of the prevailing Social Gospel cannot be reconciled with the morality of the Decalogue, as the most distin-

guished spokesman of the Social Gospel, Reinhold Niebuhr, of Union Theological Seminary in New York, has admitted in his book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1952). Beginning with the very first sentence of the Introduction, he declares society may properly do what it would be immoral for a man to do. Such a structural righteousness is not for us the righteousness of the genuine gospel.

Such a structural righteousness so-called is in reality a damnable unrighteousness.

The first and an absolutely fatal step in the direction of the Social Gospel is to *assume* that there is any righteousness of any kind whatever other than *personal* righteousness. Van Tuinen takes that step boldly (1) by criticizing the Fundamentalists for restricting themselves to *personal* righteousness; (2) by condemning them for not having a set of rules for society which rules will go beyond personal righteousness; and (3) by designating his un-Biblical idea of a required group-righteousness by using a completely non-Biblical term, the "righteousness of the gospel" which term in his context can have no other meaning than something different from personal righteousness.

Obviously, Van Tuinen and PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM are poles apart. He calls for a supra-personal, a greater righteousness than that called for by the true Law of Brotherly Love. PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, in contrast, denies that the social structure or the economic order is operated or should be operated according to the *whole* Law of Neighborly Love; instead, is declares that the social structure and the economic order can be and should be operated only on part of the Law of Neighborly Love; see the article "Is The Economic Order Properly Based on Neighborly Love?" beginning on page five of this issue.

PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM in this matter is unqualifiedly with the Fundamentalists. If they consider the principles of the Decalogue to be adequate both for the individual *and society,* so do we. If the Fundamentalists fail to appreciate some imaginary higher righteousness than personal obedience to the Law of God will give, so do we fail to appreciate that higher righteousness. We agree with the Fundamentalists that there is only *one* system of morality

— applicable unaltered to men and to institutions. We reject a dual system of morals, as proclaimed by Reinhold Niebuhr and the Social Gospel. The end result of such a dual system is that the "righteousness of the [social] gospel" is downright unrighteousness according to the Law of God.

This is no new idea in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM: Its Fourth Declaration reads:

> (a) *Promote a single rule of morality; and (b) reject a dual rule, namely, one rule for individuals and a conflicting rule for groups.*

Having noted that Van Tuinen wants a righteousness beyond *personal* righteousness, namely, a *social* righteousness, we are now prepared for the crucial question: Does Van Tuinen in any specific way indicate what his idea of social righteousness is, *and does his idea of social righteousness, or as he calls it, "the righteousness of the gospel" differ significantly from the righteousness of the social gospel as of Reinhold Niebuhr or the National Council of Churches,* to which Van Tuinen constantly refers in his column in *The Banner,* a weekly published by the Christian Reformed church? We shall answer that question in our next issue. fn

(to be continued in February 1957 issue)

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